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AUTHOR Dulle, Paul J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the need and implementation of transitional employment programs for handicapped youth. Effects on the handicapped of future automation are considered along with the need for school-business cooperation to prepare for the future. The importance of initial success in any innovation is noted. A Chicago transitional employment program is described which provided work experiences in local hospitals. Organization and operation of the program are discussed. The program features a prevocational coordinator who matches students with jobs and monitors progress. The program includes a placement component designed to ease the way toward full time competitive employment. (CL)

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Transitional Employment Programs

Paul Dulle
Peggy Childs
Carol Mc Donough
Cathy Droy

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The following document details the presentation made at the International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children on April 1, 1986, in New Orleans, Louisiana, on Transitional Employment Programs.

The purpose of this presentation is to achieve the following objectives:

1. To demonstrate the need for business, industry, labor and education to actively share in the design and implementation of training programs for the special needs population;
2. To discuss strategies for identifying, persuading and cooperating with business and industry in the exploration of and formalization of employment training options for the special needs population.
3. To discuss a process for convincing school districts to participate in non-traditional educational program alternatives for actually educating special needs students in the work world itself;
4. To describe the Transitional Employment Program, a unique model successfully implemented in Chicago's southwest suburbs;
5. To summarize the impact of the program for the special needs population and offer future directions for transitional employment programming.

The objectives will be addressed an individual components.

Objective #1

Business and industry and labor are more and more becoming involved in the educational process. School districts like New Orleans, Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles have established with the private sector synergistic relationships known as Business Sharing Partnerships, Adopt-a-School Programs and School Business Partnerships. These entities conjointly serve to benefit the contributing parties as well as the community in general. Because schools and business and labor are subsets of the larger unit - the community - they are mutually interrelated. As such, they can benefit the community by purposefully interacting to achieve mutually constructed goals. The reasons for the merger of business and labor and education then are obvious.

Consider the following:

1. In recent years, both business and education have suffered a decline in public confidence. National polls indicate that schools in the view of the public lack emphasis on basic skills and have discipline problems while business and labor are viewed as impersonal and greedy, taking excessive profits.
2. Unemployment is a national scandal. Both educators and businessmen are concerned about the difficulties youth experience in making the transition from schoolhouse to work place.
3. As inflation and federal financial difficulties continue, both educators and business people worry about the effective and efficient operation of public schools, a major recipient of business tax dollars.

TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The transitional employment concept has been emphasized as one important aspect of school-business partnerships due both to the abominable rate of unemployment among the disabled and the equally abominable fact that gargantuan amounts of tax support are required to maintain the disabled on welfare roles. Consider by way of illustration the following statistics:

"85% of the handicapped people earn less than \$7,000 per year, and 52% of these earn less than \$2,000 per year."

U.S. Census Bureau, 1976

"40% of persons with handicaps are employed, compared with 74% of the nondisabled population."

Levitan and Taggart, 1977

"The annual cost of maintaining handicapped Americans on social welfare programs is about \$155 billion, or about 9% of the gross national product, according to the statistics recently provided by B.E.H."

N.A.S.D.E. Bulletin, 2/14/80

"30 million Americans are disabled in one way or another. Of this number, over 11 million are potentially employable, yet only 4.1 million are employed. Many of these are underemployed."

N.A.S.D.E. Bulletin, 2/14/80

- " - 7.8 million adults with handicaps have no income
- 4.1 million handicapped adults earn less than \$3,000 annually
- Of the 9 million who are employed, average earnings are less than non-disabled workers by \$2,000"

Social Security Administration
Programs for the Handicapped, 1983

"Since unemployment rates for handicapped persons are quite high (50-75%), it would appear that both secondary and adult programs are not working as effectively as they might."

Attitudes Toward the Handicapped
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
Washington, D.C., 1983

"50 to 75 percent of all U.S. factory workers could be displaced by smart robots before the end of the century."

John Naisbitt, Megatrends, 1982

"Information about the quality of life for disabled Americans is really startling. I'm talking here about the results of a new Harris Poll -- results that bring us face to face with the reality of obstacles as serious as any minority group has ever known. Among the findings:

- Disabled Americans have far less education than non-disabled Americans
- Disabled Americans are much poorer than non-disabled Americans
- Two-thirds of disabled Americans (age 16-64) are not working."

Senator Lowell Weicker, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Subcommittee on
the Handicapped, 2/21/86

In addition, the problem of unemployment among the disabled is further exacerbated by the fact that over one million jobs per year are being lost to automation.

"During just a few years experimentation and development of robots have eliminated thousands of jobs. The American society of manufacturing engineers forecasts that by 1990 at least 15 percent of all assembly systems will use robots, and 20 percent of all auto assembly will be done by robots

"It has been predicted that our present rate of robotation will eliminate more than a million jobs a year, aggravating hard-core unemployment among the unskilled, downgrading an individual who has been replaced by a robot - forcing him to work at a lesser job for lesser pay and then eliminating the job when he retires - 'silent firing.' Jobs simply will not be there for the millions of young people waiting."

School and Community,
November/December, 1982

The need for cooperation is critical and it must be encouraged now. Action plans must be implemented to prepare for the future. The theory of obsolescence is working today in our classrooms and in training programs for the disabled. In effect, we are preparing them for jobs that will not exist for them in the future. Traditional high school programs have simply failed to prepare the disabled for work because not translatable experiences are provided. Learned skills that are functional are never reinforced in the naturalistic environment, the community or the world of work, and thus never generalize.

The disabled will certainly benefit from business and school partnerships but so will businesses. When the disabled have been successfully and productively employed to do jobs very dependably and accurately in the work world, businesses and the community at-large will benefit via reduction of the tax role burden and elimination of welfare payments to productively employed disabled workers.

In short, without cooperation between schools and business/industry/labor, the disabled unemployment scandal will continue and the disabled, who have much to offer, will cost tax payers more than could be saved in fiscal and human resources.

Thus, community involvement with the private sector is essential. One form of that involvement is transitional employment programming. Vocational transitioning is defined as follows:

"Vocational transition is a carefully planned process, which may be initiated by school personnel or adult service providers, to establish and implement a plan for either employment or additional vocational training or a handicapped student who will graduate or leave school in three to five years; such a process must involve special educators, vocational educators, parents and/or the student, an adult service system representative, and possibly an employer."

Definition of the Richmond
Rehabilitation Research and
Training Center of the Virginia
Commonwealth University, School of
Education (Richmond, Virginia).

This paper will describe the transition programs being operated by SWCASE in the Chicago suburbs.

INNOVATION: INTRODUCTORY STRATEGIES

Critical to the success of innovative programs is Success itself. Initially, an innovation must be introduced to the schools and businesses as a clear and concisely defined program that is packaged to sell. Simple concepts briefly outlined noting student benefits, institutional benefits and cost effective aspects are key factors required for a marketable concept. Logos and audio-visual materials can effectively enhance the presentation. To ensure "the sale", the educators must "guarantee success." We must provide a "problem-free" program for the local districts and businesses by assuming primary responsibility for problem-solving. It is imperative that we insure "success" in the early months.

During the introductory phase of a new concept, the innovator must be sensitive to the principles of change. Change is hard for many people. They fear the unknown. They also fear that new concepts may challenge their values and require them to change. It is important that the innovators listen to the concerns raised and try to learn from these questions. Acknowledge the identified problems. Provide options and information to resolve the fears. Move with the supporters that understand and support the idea. Give the other individuals time to adjust.

Once the school officials and/or business officials commit to a trial period, the educator must stack the deck to guarantee success. First impressions are incredibly lasting! Select a "winner" to be the service provider. This person must be independent and strong demonstrating an internal locus of control. The implementor must also be very experienced and capable with the students. Likewise students that are "winners" must be chosen as the first participants. Positive social skills and on-task behavior are the two most critical traits of the "winner students."

These successes become the vehicle for educating all involved - Community, Boards, Administrators, Staff, Parents and students. Keeping in mind that administrators make decisions based on values, information and constituency input, it is essential to launch an intensive public relations programs. Conduct tours and presentations for administrators, Board members, staff, parents, students and community organizations. Written coverage of the program focusing on initial successes is effective. Publicly credit the supporters as well as the students and providers. Initiate parent groups and an advisory board. Focus on supporters and successes. Circumvent obstructions and eliminate failures. Success must be your priority at this point.

Share the successes. Formally acknowledge administrators, staff, parents, students and board members who have contributed to the program. Use newspapers, newsletters, and personal letters as the forums for recognition. Awards and banquets can be particularly effective. Provide plaques or desk sets that can be used in their offices as reminder for themselves and visitors. The more people that share in the success the more the contributions. People investments yield large dividends.

Initial success is key to the birth and the blossoming of a new program. As the program grows, the commitment to public relations must continue. With maturity, the program will withstand more difficult problems and weather failures but only if all involved continue to be a part of the program and share in the successes as well.

An essential part of a Transitional Employment Program is the actual business in which students will be trained. Traditionally, a common training placement for students in special education and post secondary education vocational training programs, has been workshop settings, fast food establishments, and the janitorial departments of schools. In attempting to provide individualized training and experience for students, the Transitional Employment Program can explore some non-traditional areas for placement. An area targeted for implementation of a TEP in the south suburban area of Chicago was the local hospitals. During the first year of operation, a local public hospital participated in a joint agreement with the SWCOOP to provide the work experiences for students enrolled in the TEP. The following section will discuss strategies for accessing the local businesses and implementing necessary contractual agreements to initiate a TEP.

While linkages between business and education are continually expanding (e.g. work study programs, adopt-a-school) linkages between special education programs and business are relatively new. When establishing new or additional links between business/industry and special education programs, business leaders must become informed of the needs and capabilities of this population of future workers. They must also be able to conceptually fit the program into a philosophy of vocational development.

Most professionals have had a "student training" experience as part of their professional training. A TEP modeled after an internship and/or student teaching philosophy can be conceptually understood by business administrators and managers.

The TEP can be introduced in terms of part of the educational process from academics to actual work experiences specifically designed for individuals who will terminate formal educational training at the close of high school. The business can be assured of workers able to complete a defined and prescribed task throughout the time of the TEP. As a result of TEP experiences, the pool of trained workers will be increased. Finally, participation in a TEP provides businesses an opportunity to provide a meaningful public service.

Many professionals are willing to assist in educational programming given a few assurances. An important consideration for business as well as for school districts is the assurance of insurance coverage for the student workers. Provision of insurance, particularly Workmans Compensation coverage is a necessary responsibility for the participating educational entity. Additionally, businesses agreeing to provide work experiences for students appreciate the assurance that this activity will not require additional staffing for the supervision, training, and monitoring of the students. Assurance of sufficient job coaches and pre-vocational coordinators is essential to the smooth operation of the program.

In addition to agreeing to provide work experiences for the students, the business should be able to provide real work experiences which are transferable to other business settings in the community. The students should be considered as employees in terms of general day to day supervision, dress code requirements, attendance, punctuality and productivity for their jobs. Student evaluations are completed quarterly by job site supervisors and shared with the student and pre-vocational coordinator.

The TEP in the southwest suburban Chicago area is in its second year of operation. During the initial year the program was limited to an affiliation agreement between SWCOOP and the County of Cook at Oak Forest Hospital. The program has been expanded to include another hospital in the suburban area.

Currently there are 20 students participating in the TEP at OFH. These students have a variety of handicapping conditions including but not limited to mild to severe mental handicaps, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, behavioral disorders and multiple handicaps. It is important for educators to communicate to the work site supervisors the nature of the handicapping condition. This can be accomplished through one on one discussions or more formalized in service training.

Student workers, like regular employees have regularly assigned work schedules. The work schedule assignments are made according to the academic schedule at the home school. Student work assignments are generally for 2-3 hours per day 5 days per week. As students, however, they are entitled to all of the school holidays, vacations, inservice and institute days of the school district. When developing work assignments with department directors, the school calendar is an important consideration. Tasks assigned to student workers should be important real work experiences but not vital to the day to day operations of the facility.

In order to participate in the TEP a student must be currently enrolled in a special education program at a local high school for approximately 50% of the school day and must demonstrate adequate behavioral and communication skills. Parental approval for participation is required and students must be 16 years of age. At 16 students can be referred to the Department of Rehabilitation Services which in turn provides a stipend (pay check). Participation in the TEP will also entitle the student to receive high school credits toward graduation requirements.

The TEP referral is reviewed by the hospital prevocational coordinator to assure that all entrance criteria has been met and that there will be an appropriate work experience for the students individual needs. Following an interview at the school and completion of necessary paperwork (IEP) a tentative work site is identified. The prevocational coordinator schedules an interview for the student worker and hospital department director or designee.

When students are accepted into the TEP they participate in an orientation activities modeled after those provided to hospital employees. These activities are directed by the hospital liaison and prevocational coordinator who address hospital rules and regulations and TEP rules and regulations, respectively. TEP workers receive photo id's, uniforms where appropriate, and time sheets.

Student work site assignments are generated by the prevocational coordinator in conjunction with hospital departmental directors. Assignments are made based upon individual ability and limitations. Students working in dietary services prewash silverware, portion food, complete area sanitation (washing tables and chairs). Janitorial service workers are responsible for garbage removal, sweeping, dusting, mopping, window sill washing, etc. Student workers are assigned as clerical aides in the clinical lab pharmacy, psychology/vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapy, human resource development, and medical records departments. Responsibilities of clerical aides include, xeroxing, filing, collating, stapling, simple typing, answering the telephone and taking messages, and running errands throughout the hospital areas. Grounds maintenance service workers mow and trim lawns, sweep leaves and snow, assist with the movement of furniture within the hospital complex and prepare the soil for planting of spring flowers. A supply clerk in the warehouse works with the storage and distribution of office, janitorial and dietary supplies. Students assigned as transporters accompany patients from their rooms to scheduled clinics and therapy departments. The transporters are responsible for the safe movement of patients in wheelchairs and on gurney carts. The print shop and public information department offers students the opportunity to learn forms distribution, and the use of basic print shop machinery including collator, perforator, numbering machine, and hole punch. Patient clothing and surgical gowns are prepared in the linen supply room. The TEP student assigned to this area replaces buttons on shirts, packages surgical gowns, and folds linens for distribution to patient care areas. Therapeutic recreation assistants interact with patients by assisting in arts and crafts, adaptive sports programs, and parties.

As students enter TEP with differing skill levels as well as individual limitations the prevocational coordinator carefully matches students with jobs, provides initial job coaching, monitors students on a daily basis and adjusts and increases tasks as appropriate. Each job has a training plan based upon a task analysis completed by the prevocational coordinator. Additionally, a key role for the prevocational coordinator is to continually develop new job sites with hospital personnel.

The TEP prevocational coordinator and hospital department managers work together to provide an meaningful experience for the students which also provides work outcomes for the facility. There are several cautions of which both school and hospital personnel must be aware. As with any change, there may be initial resistance and rumors. Rumors, particularly around the issue of "job stealing" and "crazy kids" may be countered with factual information presented on a one to one basis, through the facility newspaper, at union steward meetings, or departmental meetings. A further caution may be of the "over protection syndrome". At times employees may tend to parent the students and over protect them rather than treating them as peer workers.

Each year the TEP ends in early summer with a banquet. The banquet serves as a thank you from the students to their supervisors and offers the hospital an opportunity to recognize the students efforts. Students are given a certificate of completion and students in turn present the departmental director with a plaque. Representative administrators from the participating high school districts, special education coop and hospital have an opportunity to observe the positive interaction of student workers and hospital staff.

TEP is not an end stage program. Built into the program is a placement component. Throughout the school year, the vocational coordinator and vocational adjustment coordinator work with the student to locate and obtain employment within the community. The success of this activity is an important evaluative component for the hospital. The long range goal of TEP is a measure of its success, namely the transition of individuals from a student status to a status of full time employment within the competitive work force.